People's Republic of China may be associated as Observer. The Summit further decided that the modalities regarding Observer status will be decided at the twenty-seventh meeting of the SAARC Council of Minister in July, 2006.

Electric detonators with Indian Nationals

1797. SHRI PRASANTA CHATTERJEE: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that some Indian nationals were carrying 61,858 electric detonators for L.T.T.E. on 25th January, 2006; and

(b) whether there is any co-relation between this and off loading of six containers of explosives in sea by MV Egria in December, 2005?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) According to the reports available with this Ministry, the Sri Lankan Navy intercepted a fishing dhow on January 25, 2006 in Sri Lankan territorial waters, and found 5 Indian fishermen with 61,056 electric detonators in their possession.

(b) There is no information available in this regard.

Acquisition of land for Foreign Mission

1798. SHRI B.K. HARIPRASAD: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether during 2003-04, there have been gross lack of diligence by his Ministry in the matters of acquisition of properties abroad as well as in India for its missions and sub-ordinate offices;

(b) whether Government have also failed to acquire land in Addis Ababa and Algiers on reciprocal basis from the Government of Ethiopia and Algeria;

(c) whether Government have in place a mechanism to exercise effective control over missions/posts abroad to ensure avoidance of irregular expenditure on rented accommodation in excess of prescribed rental ceilings; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI ANAND SHARMA): (a) No, Sir. It has been the endeavour of the Ministry, as far as possible, to acquire properties abroad as well as in India for its Missions and subordinate offices, with a view to minimizing expenditure on rentals. In this context, vigorous efforts continued in the year 2003-04 also resulting in acquisition of properties for Chancery in Prague and Embassy Residence in Panama and Consul General's Residence in Chicago.

(b) No, Sir. Following persistent efforts of the Ministry, the Ethiopian authorities have offered two plots of land in Addis Ababa on reciprocal basis in Sept. 2005. Agreement to acquire these plots is being finalized. Proposal for reciprocal exchange of properties between the Government of India and Government of Algeria for their diplomatic missions in Algiers and New Delhi has been under consideration for some time. Though Government of India had earmarked a plot for the Algerian Diplomatic mission in New Delhi, the reciprocal exchange of plots of land had failed to materialize in the absence of any suitable offer from the Algerian Government. As of now, no plot is earmarked for the Algerian Diplomatic mission in New Delhi.

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) Entitlement to accommodation for different levels of officers is very cearly defined in the relevant rules, both in terms of plinth area and level of furnishing. The Heads of Mission also have delegated powers to hire residential properties within the limits prescribed under the Delegated Financial Powers of Government of India's Representatives abroad. Any renting of property beyond the delegated powers has to be approved by the Ministry of External Affairs. The Missions also require specific approval of the Ministry for hiring any property for use as Chancery or as Embassy Residence. All such proposals are examined taking into account the prescribed area norms, functional requirements, security situation and the prevailing rentals in the local markets. After careful examination of all the relevant parameters and factors, the Ministry fixes individual rentals or rental ceilings for different levels of officers for a particular Mission/Post abroad.